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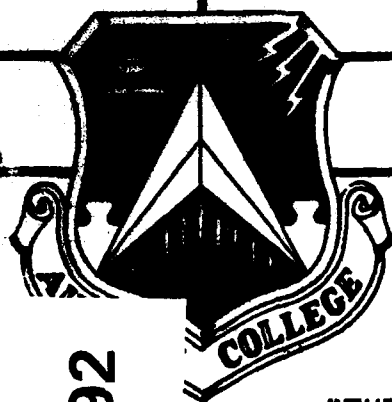
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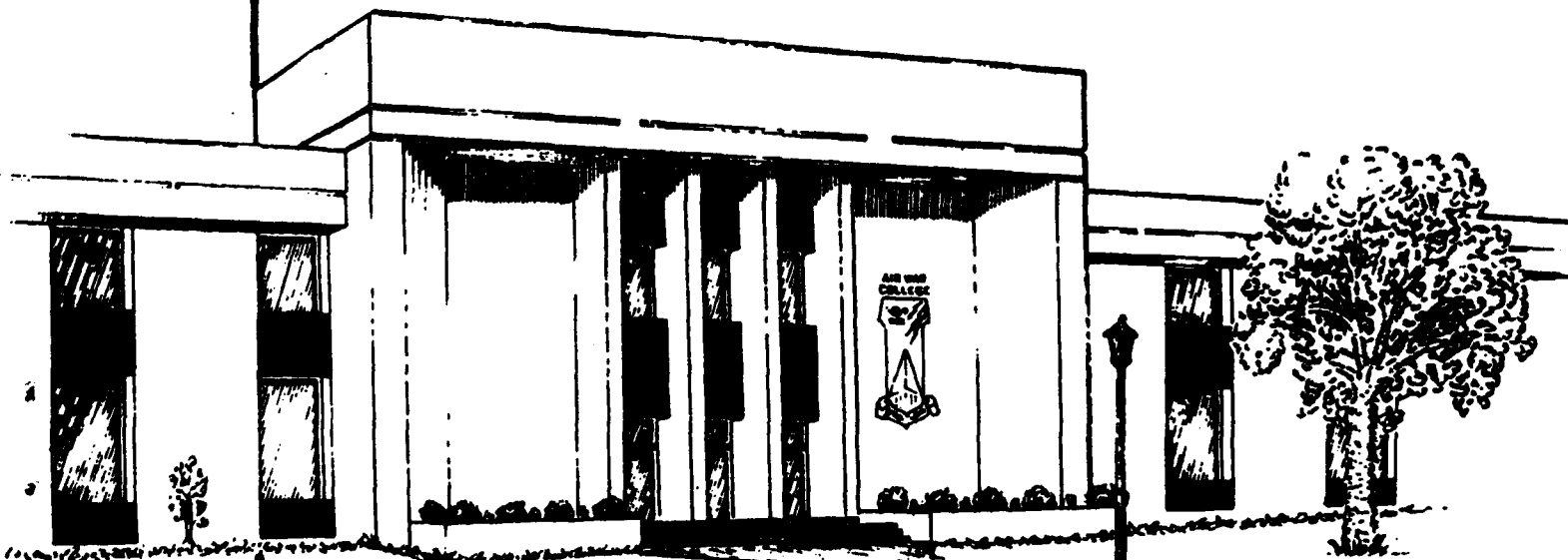
# AIR WAR COLLEGE

## RESEARCH REPORT

"THE MALVINAS WAR FROM THE ARGENTINIAN VIEWPOINT"

LT COL RICARDO ALBERT PUCHE

1988



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AIR UNIVERSITY  
UNITED STATES AIR FORCE  
MAXWELL AIR FORCE BASE, ALABAMA

AIR WAR COLLEGE

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"THE MALVINAS WAR FROM THE ARGENTINIAN VIEWPOINT"

by

Ricardo Albert Puche

Lt. Col, SPANISH AIR FORCE

A RESEARCH REPORT SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY

IN

FULFILLMENT OF THE RESEARCH REQUIREMENT

Research Advisor: Dr. David Farnsworth

MAXWELL AIR FORCE BASE, ALABAMA

May 1988

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## DISCLAIMER

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## ABSTRACT

In any conflict, regardless of its nature, the two sides never agree on the final assessment.

The purpose of this research is to show the Argentinian assessment of the war, especially in those controversial aspects where both sides strongly disagree. All the information is mainly from Argentinian sources due to the fact that the author had a two months assignment to the Argentinian C-130 Squadron from the First Air Transport Brigade. This fact allowed the author to talk with a lot of different people involved in the war, especially from the Air Force. He also had the opportunity to consult many official reports in relation with the operations, and also to read the newspaper and magazines which had just begun to analyze and assess the recent war.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

Lieutenant Colonel Ricardo Albert is a member of the Spanish Air Force, Air Staff graduated. He entered in the Spanish Air Force Academy in 1960 and graduated as a Lieutenant in 1964.

His recent assignments include 5 years' command of the C-130 Squadron, where he implemented the first in-flight refuelling operations made in Spain between these aircraft and the Mirage F-1s. In the last two years he was assigned to the Logistic Division of Air Staff Headquarter in Madrid, acting as the Spanish delegate to NAMSA and EUROLOG.

Lt. Colonel Albert have flown more than 40 different aircraft and amassed more than 7,500 flying hours, especially in training and transport aircraft.

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### PURPOSE.

Many documents, including books, magazines, newspapers, research papers in War Colleges, symposiums, etc, have been written on the Malvinas Campaign. They have extensively addressed this extraordinary war between a powerful developed country and a Third World country.

However, most observers have used British sources, with very little information coming from the Argentinian perspective. The experiences and viewpoints of the defeated are obviously not as interesting as that of the victors.

Nonetheless, it is worth while for professional military people to understand the full background, in order to study and compare both assessments and evaluations.

During an assignment with the Argentinian C-130 Squadron, the author of this research had the opportunity to talk with the Argentinian protagonists, especially with those of the Argentinian Air Force, just two months after the conflict ended. Also, he has had access to Argentinian official documents on the event. As a result, he realized that the ideas many people have about the conflict is not well balanced and without sufficient information from both sides, particularly in English speaking countries.

When I started collecting information for this research, I



realized that only a few books from Argentinian or South American sources were available in the Air University Library.

An unbalanced study of a significant event such as the Malvinas War, which has many implications on air-sea warfare, could result in erroneous outcomes.

The purpose of this research is to highlight the assessment and analysis made by Argentinian official sources, and contrast them with the British information, whether they be official or unofficial. Attempting to be honest and impartial in my research paper was the hardest job I have ever performed. But the final result must be judged by the reader.

## CHAPTER II

### BACKGROUND

#### GEOSTRATEGIC.

The Malvinas Islands lie deep in the South Atlantic, within the Argentinian continental shelf. They comprise two major islands separated by the San Carlos Strait, and over 200 smaller ones. The whole islands group covers an area of 4,700 square miles which is equivalent to the area of Jamaica.

The climate is severe, often with strong winds. The islands are also treeless with only thick peat covering the lowlands.

The Islands' economy is based almost entirely on the export of wool from sheep which roam all over the islands. This economy is not self-sufficient, and the principal commercial concern is The Falkland Islands Company. This company owns 80 per cent of the total economic product. Communications are a considerable problem because the only roads are in Stanley, the capital. The peat cover makes travel very difficult. The islands support a small population of just over 1,900, most of whom were born there.

In the years before the war, Argentina was supporting these habitants in many ways, especially with an airline, fresh food, mail management and emergency medical care. The UK showed very little interest in the colony for economic reasons.

Potential resources in oil, minerals, and sea products are factors of economic interest to the superpowers. A report at-

tributed to a Shell survey, speculated that there was enough oil between the Malvinas and the Patagonia coast to justify the label of a "New Kuwait". The largest untapped source of protein--Antarctic krill also exists. Additionally, the islands' strategic position is critical to control of the South Atlantic, with many commercial lines of communication that are of vital importance to the USA, Canada, and Europe. The superpowers have always been interested in establishing naval and air bases to control not only the South Atlantic but the Antarctic as well. This ice-covered continent is going to play an important role within the next century in the international arena.

The increased value of submarine warfare makes the area more and more valuable as detection devices can be installed and used most effectively due to the islands' flat platform. It is also noteworthy to consider the predicted role that will be played by the South American continent as it progresses from underdevelopment.

#### **HISTORICAL.**

The debate on the sovereignty of the Malvinas raged throughout the war; many of the real issues were obscured by the one-sided emotional polemics. There is very little reason to be dogmatic concerning the claims long made by both countries about the Islands' sovereignty. The more one reads, the more confused one becomes; and depending on the main sources of information results can be contradictory. Although this is not the key issue in this work, it is interesting to note the following points:

a) For Argentina, recovery of the Malvinas has been a point of national pride for generations. Every Argentinian child learns in school of how the British "pirates" forcibly stole the islands from his country in 1833. Since 1833, Argentina has consistently articulated its claims to the islands, yet lacked the power to back them up. Where applicable, Argentinian treaties, contain reservations which reiterate the claim and made allowances for restitution of the islands.

Successive governments have pressed the Argentinian claim at the United Nations, the Organization of American States and in bilateral negotiations with the UK. These negotiations have been punctuated by a series of diplomatic incidents, military encounters and warnings of invasion by the Argentinian.

b) Conversely as stated above, many British governments have had serious doubts about the case, which is highly contentious in terms of international law. In 1910 a member of the Foreign Office Research Department, Gaston Bernhardt, produced a memorandum which became the standard basis for the British claim for the two next decades. It stated: "From a perusal of this memo, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the Argentinian government's attitude is not altogether unjustified and that our action has been somewhat high-handed".

The existence of such doubts was discovered by Peter Beck, a senior lecturer in politics at Kingston Polytechnic, who later wrote an article on the subject in the Journal of Inter-American Studies and World Affairs in February 1982. Since the hostili-

ties, many of the records which Beck used at the Public Record Office in London have been closed to public scrutiny by the Foreign Office.

In 1936, John Troutbeck, head of the American department of the Foreign Office, stated that it was impossible to explain Britain's possession other than in terms of the most arbitrary seizure. Leaseback arrangements with Argentina were suggested by the British diplomat, Sir Neville Henderson, in 1930 and taken up by Lord Willingdon in 1940.

The Foreign Office file in 1940 entitled "Proposed offer by His Majesty's Government to reunite Falkland Islands with Argentina and acceptance of lease," is officially closed until the year 2015. Its very title suggest a serious consideration by the British of the Argentinian claims.

c) Neither the British nor the Argentinians have wanted to take the case to the International Court of Justice at The Hague because there is no certainty which way the decision might go. But there is a more important aspect than the legal implications of the case, and this is the historical context as to how Argentina became the heir to Spain's Mar del Plata sovereignty, which included the islands.

#### **POLITICAL.**

In September 1964, Argentina formally reasserted its claims of the Malvinas before the United Nations Committee on Decolonization, and the next year the UN General Assembly adopted Resolution 2065 which invited both countries to obtain a peaceful

settlement of their differences. The adoption of this resolution was regarded as a victory for Argentina.

The conversations started in early 1966, and were held until 1982 with little success, and were punctuated by a series of diplomatic incidents, military encounters and warnings of invasion. The UK engaged in a sort of "diplomatic footdragging" that has enraged and frustrated their Argentinian counterparts. On the rare occasion when progress in the negotiations was made, proposals to resolve the matter have floundered in Westminster.

By early 1982 the situation became critical, which resulted mainly from the ever-increasing criticism and public difficulties faced by the Argentinian Military Junta as a consequence of the internal political and economic crises. There were a number of signals indicating Argentinian political intentions to retake the islands by force as a means to divert the population's concern.

The stage was set; it only needed a spark to transform a political issue into a real war. The spark was ignited by the incident provoked by Davidoff's firm, an Argentinian contractor assigned to dismantle obsolete whaling stations on the Georgia Islands. Conversely, however, the British officials stated that the Argentinian government did not intervene in the case.

The history of the British actions as regards to its overseas issues can be explained in two major constants: Using its power to maintain its old colonial empire, and a certain blindness towards changed world opinion regarding colonialism.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE ROAD TO WAR

##### DIPLOMATIC ISSUES.

The creation of the United Nations after World War II started the worldwide decolonization process. In 1946 the UK presented a list of 43 territories to be decolonized, including the Malvinas Islands. In 1960 Resolution 1514, regarding the conditions under which the process might be carried out, was sanctioned by the UN General Assembly. These principles are the right of self-determination and the prohibition of any attempt to violate the integral unity of states.

This introduced a contradictory fact because self-determination can be used as a tool for territorial dismemberment. The British policy has always been based on the first principle, and ignoring the second. There are many historical examples to confirm it, Gibraltar being a significant one.

For more than thirty years every Argentinian government tried to deal with the issue from different political approaches: "smile", "economical", "pressure", etc, but has always been unsuccessful. At the same time they maintained their legal struggle at the UN, obtaining some significant victories as shown in the UN Resolutions 2065 and 3260; nonetheless the results were always of no practical effect. It must also be noted that Argentina had international support from the Organization of American States and the Non-Aligned Countries.

#### **ARGENTINA: THE DECISION PROCESS FOR PROJECTING MILITARY POWER.**

South Georgia had, until 1960, been the base for the world's largest on-shore whaling industry. The advent of factory ships made shore-based factories obsolete. Davidoff's Georgia Islands Company had contracts to demolish three whaling stations located on Georgia Islands. According to documents in his possession, stamped with a round seal which reads "Received by the British Embassy", he had the full permission of the British Consul to land on South Georgia.

Unfortunately when they arrived on 19 March, his men raised the blue and white Argentine flag. This patriotic gesture was interpreted by members of a nearby British research team as something more sinister. They radioed London and warned that a possible Argentinian invasion was underway. The UK protested to Argentina and the HMS Endurance was dispatched with a party of marines. The nuclear submarine HMS Superb was also sent to the area.

As a result of the Davidoff's case and the consequent over reaction by the British, the Military Junta met on 28 March to analyze the situation. Two options were presented: one, taking the islands militarily before the British could reinforce its military presence in the area; or second, forget the military option as a means of recovering the islands for the foreseeable future. The first option was selected, and it is interesting to analyze some of the major factors involved in this decision process.



Galtieri, head of the Junta, was aware that in order to survive politically he had to introduce a political initiative to galvanize Argentinian nationalism, win popular elections, fulfill Argentina's geopolitical destiny, and become an anticolonial champion in the world's eyes.

There were a number of indications in the first three months of 1982 that the government was planning to occupy the islands. A report in La Prensa, on 29 January from a columnist with close links with the armed forces, stated that Argentina was preparing to present Britain with a virtual ultimatum for settling their dispute and that the possibility of military action was not excluded. There was a belief that an occupation would be relatively easy, and the British government would be unlikely to react strongly to such action. In addition the Junta was also confident of the US's reaction, considering the United States policy since the Second World War, which has three cornerstones: the Monroe doctrine, dating from 1823, which sought to exclude European powers from the American continent; the 1947 Rio Treaty (the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance), which established a collective security doctrine by which any American state threatened by an outside power could call on fellow signatories to the treaty for military assistance; and finally, the creation in 1948 of the Organization of American States (OAS). Furthermore, Galtieri was also convinced that the Argentinian support of US policy in Central America would be a worthy cause in the Reagan Administration's foreseeable reaction. Related to

this, on March 8, when Mr. Enders was questioned about the position of his country in the Malvinas', his answer was: "Hands off".

The first consideration by the Argentinian Junta to use its national military power to retake the Malvinas Islands was in a meeting held on March 5 at Navy Headquarters. One week later a working team, was established, which was made up of only three Generals, to plan the military intervention. The invasion plan was developed in the strictest secrecy such that even the Argentinian secret service was not aware of the military operation. In fact, only selected members of the Junta and high ranking officials were briefed on the operation. The Air Force commander was not aware of the invasion until the day of its execution. The plan was codenamed "Azul", and it is important to bear in mind that it clearly specified that the Armed Forces would not be able to implement it until May 15, and this meant an advanced prewarning of almost two weeks.

It is thought that due to the Argentinian initiative to start the hostilities, its Armed Forces would be appropriately alerted to prepare war plans, coordinate between services, prepare logistical arrangements, training, etc. But nothing was done, and all the Services were unaware of the political decision. This fact seems incredible when we consider that the Junta was composed of military men.

#### THE US ROLE: HAIG'S MISSION.

Initially, the US refused to be involved in the South Atlan-

tic crisis and its uncertainty regarding the sovereignty of the Malvinas led it to offer a minimal conciliatory gesture only concerning the South Georgia's incident. Only when alerted by US intelligence of the Argentinian intention to retake the islands by force did it offer its services. However, the US tempered its actions toward Argentina and was careful with the language used against Buenos Aires, preventing as well a move to denounce Argentina as an "aggressor" at the United Nations.

The above facts, coupled with US's need for support in Latin America, President Galtieri's clear support of US policy in Central America, and finally the personality of Secretary of State Haig, expressly designated by President Reagan to mediate, led the Argentinian Junta to interpret the US attitude as a "green light" and proof that its risk-calculations had been correct. This was a great miscalculation, as was soon to be seen.

When the Malvinas crisis abruptly entered world politics, Haig seized the opportunity with both hands and set out to seek a peaceful settlement of the problem. He selected a "shuttle diplomacy" between London and Buenos Aires.

Haig knew one actor in the dispute well, the UK, and felt a communion of interest with London based on his experience as NATO supreme commander. Moreover, he admired the British temperament and thus was unlikely to presuppose that London would not express a spirit of negotiation. In accordance with this, Haig saw that the UK was the principal player in the dispute. Moreover, his relations with Britain were good; thus he foresaw that

the problem would have an easy solution, based on his military background, as well as his friendly relationship with British policymakers which could be a useful tool to deal with the Argentinian Military Junta. He never thought that the British fleet would reach the South Atlantic since he believed the dispute would be settled long before that. He did not think Britain cared about sovereignty, but rather about the island's administration and honor. On the other hand, if Argentina cared about sovereignty and not about administration, then something could be worked out.

On April 8, Haig's first trip was undertaken with a strong desire to resolve the dispute, but when it ended on April 11, diplomacy began to collapse. When Haig discovered that the British had no real desire to negotiate and were not even willing to offer proposals, his attention was directed to the "weaker" side, Argentina, which was seen as the more flexible at the time. For this reason Haig pressed Argentina time after time to be even more flexible on each of its proposals drafted to the UK. His intervention merely consisted of modifying Argentinian texts instead of presenting alternatives.

By the time Haig made his second mission, the situation was already going out of control as a consequence of general feeling in Argentina that Washington was already helping London militarily, the failure to check the advance of the British fleet south from Ascension Island, the growing support for Argentina in Latin America, and, finally, an increased lobby against Haig in Wash-

ington.

Mr. Haig offered Argentina the first and only US proposal for future sovereignty negotiations on April 27, and gave Argentina 24 hours in which to reply. Argentinian intelligence knew that the British had received the same proposal four days earlier, and so had had more time to study it. The Argentinian suspicions grow and from this point Argentina no longer had confidence in Haig's role.

Mr. Haig failed in his mission due to his lack of knowledge of the Malvinas issue, his inexperience in dealing with a conflict in the North-South axis while being accustomed to thinking in terms of the East-West confrontation, and finally due to the fact that the British never had serious intentions to negotiate.

This failure in Haig's diplomatic skills concluded with his removal from Reagan's Administration as a means of repairing the damage suffered by United States in its relations with Central and South American countries.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE WAR

#### GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS.

As explained in previous chapters the Argentinian Armed Forces lacked sufficient readiness and psychological push to face the war. The initial plan was conceived only to retake the islands militarily as a means to forcing the UK to break the stalemate and prevent delays affecting the political controversy.

On March 28, the Argentinian fleet broke away from a naval maneuver with Uruguay to begin Operation "Rosario", as it was named in secret code. D Day was established to be April 1, with two other alternative dates, April 2 and 3, should adverse weather conditions prevail.

Argentinian Task Force 40 arrived at Port Stanley, the Malvinas capital in the early morning of April 2. Fortunately there was not a strong firefight, due to the weakness of the deployed British forces (only 80 Royal Marines were available) and the Argentinians gained control. The order from Argentinian command was very strict in terms of avoiding enemy losses, especially among the civilian population. Three hours later the Governor surrendered, and the blue and white Argentinian flag was raised at Stanley after 149 years of British domination.

On April 3, another Argentinian invasion force appeared at Grytviken in South Georgia where 22 Royal Marines were stationed. The detachment was ready to fight after being advised by radio

about the surrender of Port Stanley. The British shot down two Argentinian helicopters and inflicted some damage on the enemy frigate Guerrico. The British force surrendered at 11:20.

On April 2, Buenos Aires awoke to a jubilant historic day. People wept in the streets, and blue and white flags flew over buildings. The emotional force of the Malvinas issue is hard to understand for the non-Argentinian perspective. Here it was visible for all to see that the latent desire for the Malvinas in every Argentinian since 1833 is more than a schoolbook indoctrination. And after 150 years of existence without their "little sister", as the islands are called, people throughout Argentina were thrilled at the news. The decision makers were also affected by this emotional response, yet their joy was tempered by anxiety concerning about how the British would react. Would the plan work?

Yet to put things in proper perspective it must be said that Argentina had not yet recovered the islands. To fully reach this target they had to get international recognition, beginning with the UK. By April 2, Argentina had only two facts: it not only had given a slap in the face to a decadent colonial empire, but also had given Mrs. Thatcher the opportunity to carry out her plans to sustain and maintain the political power of her party as well as herself. Argentina had to pay for this at a very high price.

In accordance with the planned touch-and-go operation, after which there would be United Nations Security Council intervention

and a Argentinian withdrawal to demonstrate good negotiating intentions, the invading forces started to fly back to Argentina by late evening of April 2. A force of fewer than 500 troops remained by April 3, and this was later reduced.

It is important to state that for the Argentinian Air Force the first notice about the invasion came at the last minute as it did for the other services. On April 1 an extensive briefing was held in El Palomar, the headquarter of Argentinian First Air Transport Brigade, where orders were issued to implement an aerial bridge to Comodoro Rivadavia for the deployment of fighter units. No earlier plans had been made.

On April 5, the first British task force ships sailed from the UK. Argentina needed to revise its plan. From this moment improvisation would be the determinant factor in almost every subsequent Argentinian operation.

#### **ADVERSARIES: STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES.**

In order to clearly understand the predictable outcome of the war, a brief overview about the readiness, in the broad sense of the word, of each British service seems necessary in order to compare them with those of Argentina. We will also mention some key facts which had deep repercussions on the operations as well as on the Argentinian plans and operations.

**ARMY:** All British land forces involved in the battle were fully professional, well trained, equipped and supported. The specific training of some of its component-such as the Commandos-was of particular importance. Furthermore, the accident of his-



tory which had made the Royal Marines a specialist arctic-warfare force, trained in Norway, contributed decisively to victory in the Malvinas.

The leadership and initiative displayed from high ranking officers down to the last soldier were remarkable. These factors together with both physical and mental toughness were the main keys to success. British forces also had considerable experience in combined operations as a consequence of its frequent exercises within NATO's framework.

On the other side, the Argentinian forces were conscripts, most of which came from the country's arid and hot regions, and in most cases without having completed the established training programs. They had no experience in combined operations, lacked modern equipment and lacked sufficiently trained combat officers and NCOs. Their inappropriate winter clothing and equipment to fight in the severe South Atlantic winter played an important role in the final result. Furthermore Argentinian troops were deployed without adequate lodging and messing facilities, due to the lack of a large infrastructure on the islands. Only one third of the Argentinian regular forces, the marines, were able to operate with a high degree of professionalism and efficiency.

As the war later demonstrated, the unified defense command established under General Menendez was ill-suited to perform combined operations. Not a single field exercise was carried out prior to the invasion, and its staff had to struggle with Argentina's complex peacetime command structure, the traditional

rivalry between services, and the poor communications network to receive orders from the decision centers located on the continent.

The Falklands lay within the Navy's sphere of responsibility, under the control of Admiral Lombardo at Puerto Belgrano on the mainland, yet the Army and Air Force Command on the continent were located further south at Comodoro Rivadavia. The hapless General Menendez was dependent on a complicated chain of liaison for communication between services. After the General Belgrano was sunk and following withdrawal of the fleet to mainland bases, the other services were unwilling to accept orders from a service that was contributing little to the war. The resulting recriminations among services aggravated the historical rivalry between them and prevented a real and effective cooperation.

General Menendez might have conducted his campaign with more confidence and effectiveness had he been given the two battalions of mountain commandos which remained at Comodoro Rivadavia during the war. These two battalions were primarily charged with responsibilities to guard against a possible Chilean intervention. The bulk of Menendez's forces were raw conscripts. An immense effort was needed to keep them supplied, while they were of little value on the battlefield. In addition to this, their morale, determination, and motivation were low, especially when they realized that the British intended to fight.

The precarious Argentinian supply system on the islands was created to meet the needs of a brigade for a month, but after a

further reinforcement, there were more than 11,000 men to be fed for a period of three months, and the existing system could not cope. Even if General Menendez could not have defeat the British task force, he certainly could have caused it very serious damage even with the human resources at his disposal. But his refusal to do more than hold fixed positions condemned him to inevitable defeat.

The simple truth is that the Argentinian Army had no conception of how to wage a war against a major and well-equipped enemy.

NAVY: The British Navy is the world's third largest fleet, with proven experience from centuries at sea, and is very well-trained in air-sea warfare as well as in amphibious operations. Like the Royal Army, it has training, experience and valuable doctrine due to its NATO commitments.

The task force fleet dispatched to the South Atlantic composed around 110 ships, including the carriers Invincible and Hermes, the most sophisticated missile frigates, and at least six submarines, two of which were nuclear, the Conqueror and the Courageous. These vessels played a most important role in the battle due to the reaction provoked within the Argentinian Navy. Their very presence in the area created a great fear for the Argentinian Navy's command and after the sinking of the General Belgrano the Argentinians decided to withhold their fleet in mainland's harbors.

The British Navy showed its capabilities by preparing, in

only two weeks, a task force to send 8,000 miles away from home, with all the logistic support. They had to establish a joint forward operational base in the Ascension Islands, and, in this case, US cooperation became invaluable. Requisitioned merchant ships alone transported 9,000 personnel, 100,000 tons of freight and more than 100 aircraft to the battlefield. The global figures, however are still more impressive: 100 million tons of supplies and 400,000 cubic meters of fuel were transported by sea.

In the exceptional circumstances of the campaign the British procurement process was efficient and flexible. The new operational demands were satisfied in record time through the availability of scientific and engineering support from the Ministry of Defense research establishments and the UK's defense industries. Many modifications were made on vital weapon systems, such as the creation of AEW capability using Nimrod search-waters radars in Sea King helicopters, man-portable radar jammers, the adaptation of Vulcan, C-130 and Nimrod aircraft for air-to-air refuelling, etc.

On the Argentinian side, its Navy was composed of a curious mixture of old and new ships. Its major capital vessels -a carrier, the General Belgrano, and a heavy cruiser, the 25 de Mayo- were forty years old, obsolete, and handed down from previous wars and combatants. Several of the destroyers and frigates, however, were modern ships incorporating the latest in electronics and missile technology. The Navy also had four diesel-powe-

red submarines, two of them ex-American vessels whose appropriate place would have been a war museum.

It is important to state the circumstances involved in the Belgrano's sinking. After the war, many commentators referred to the sinking in terms of self-defense and made mention of the possibility of this cruiser's Exocet capabilities. The important issue here is not that in reality the ship did not possess these weapons, but the fact that the impact of the Exocet was not known because it had not been previously used in combat. The real fact is that the Belgrano was at least 40 miles away from the TEZ (Total Exclusion Zone) decreed by the UK, and steaming toward Argentina's mainland. This was a critical political decision taken by Mrs. Thatcher, with the total acquiescence of the War Cabinet after two requests were made by the Conqueror's captain to confirm the given order to torpedo the ship. The Belgrano was playing the rules as imposed by British, yet for political considerations, rather than military, it was sunk and almost 400 Argentinian sailors were killed and the UK earned worldwide scorn and surprise for its action.

Argentina's naval air arm was too small to achieve decisive control of the area. Furthermore its concerns about the threat posed by the British submarines led it to act as a land-based air force, taking no advantage from its carrier. This aerial force, equipped with the best weapon system available in the country- the Super Etendard and Exocet missile- rarely participated in joint operations with the Air Force.

When hostilities began, Argentina had only took delivery 5 of their 12 Super Etendard fighters. The remaining 7 aircraft had been accepted by the government but still had not been delivered from France. Likewise, only 5 of their 24 air-to-surface versions of the Exocet AM-39 missiles had been directly supplied to Argentina. The Argentinians had very little training and very little technical support from France due to the economic and military restrictions imposed by the European Community, yet they achieved obvious success with these missiles against a sophisticated fleet, trained to fight in the NATO scenario. It is open to question what could have happened if Argentina had had all of their 24 Exocets.

If the Navy had dispersed its ships, they could have sailed out under cover of darkness of the night to stage a hit and run Exocet raids against the British. Although there was a slight possibility of losing some ships to the Royal Navy's submarines, there was an equal certainty of being able to introduce some ships to disrupt the British operations. Once more the prospect of heavy losses deterred the Argentinian admirals from taking the risk.

**AIR FORCE:** The British Air Force was not designed to fight in such a scenario as the Malvinas, but rather to operate in the European theater. In fact the RAF's aircraft, with the exception of the Harrier, were unable to operate in the South Atlantic unless some major modifications were done on them. Typically they were the Vulcans, C-130s and Nimrods.

The so called Task Force 317 only had the two versions of Harriers-the Sea Harriers and the GR-3s- and helicopters, to employ as an air arm, due to some limitations on the carriers. The Sea Harrier is a plane designed amid great controversy in the sixties and it never received full acceptance in the aeronautical arena. Its VSTOL capability is the only remarkable performance when comparing it with other aircraft, However, after the Malvinas war it became a star without any real reason. By the end of the conflict 72 Harriers had been deployed to operate with the Task Force. The GR-3 version had to be fitted with different equipment to perform its new role, and this was done quickly and efficiently.

But the air power deployed by the British in the South Atlantic theater failed to accomplish the two major roles they had to carry out: neutralize the runway at Stanley, and achieve air superiority. How could they be successful in the second objective could be arguable, but there are two facts to support this statement: the Argentinian fighters attacked any time they wanted and could, and the C-130s remained operating until the very last day of the war, exactly until midnight on May 13.

The British Task Force employed more than 270 helicopters in various roles. They performed every role assigned to them very well, and gave the British a priceless capability and flexibility. Once more this war demonstrated the old theory, still not very well accepted by many navy men, about the inefficiency of a naval fleet without a strong air power on board.

At the time of this conflict the Argentinian Air Force stood thirtieth in the world. It was composed of a variety of different aircraft both new and old, and most of them were refurbished outdated models bought from the USAF. As fighters they had the A-4 Skyhawk models B and C, Mirage III, and Mirage V Daggers, supplied by Israel. They also possessed a few deteriorated British Canberra bombers, and finally, many Argentinian-built Pucarás, a twin turboprop mainly designed for counterinsurgency purposes. For transport missions the Argentinian Air Force had 9 C-130s, two of them KC-130 models for inflight air refueling, 4 Boeing 707s and some Fokker 27 and 28 models, all of which were assigned to the First Air Transport Brigade. Of a total of 220 aircraft, only 70 per cent were available due to problems with spare parts.

From the very beginning of the escalation, Argentinian aviators made plans and speculated, trying to design their future campaign taking into consideration predictable strengths and weaknesses. The following restrictive factors coming into play: They could not maintain air superiority over the islands considering the fact that their aircraft had to operate in the far range of their capability, allowing only 2 to 3 minutes on target. Also there was no time to extend the length of the runway at Stanley, although PSP runway matting and aircraft BAK-9/MA-1A barriers were available. A "higher priority" had been established for sea transport and this was the only means to send it to the islands. For this reason only the Pucarás, Aermacchi and



some T-34 Mentors were able to operate from any of the unprepared airstrips on the islands.

This decision was probably one of the major tactical miscalculations made by the Argentinian Air Force in their preplanning because it had a dynamic effect on operational concepts in force deployment employed by both sides. It denied the effective projection of Argentinian air power into the naval battle arena and placed the British at a better tactical advantage.

Argentinian disadvantages were:

- Operating from mainland bases imposed severe limitations in planning long extended air operations. It was necessary to use air refuelling support from the only two tankers available for 82 fighters having refuelling capability.
- They had no specific reconnaissance aircraft, thus they had to use the 707 and Learjet 35 in this role. The results were poor while the risk was high.
- The success and failure of the air operations rest on the prevailing weather conditions. Unfortunately for the Argentinians when the British began their assault on San Carlos Bay, the weather on the mainland was below minimum, which prohibited the Argentinians from launching air attacks against the vulnerable landing forces.
- Unlike the Navy's Super Etendard, the Air Force's fighters were generally not equipped with modern and accurate radar or navigational systems. To compensate for those deficiencies the Air Force had to use the Learjet 35, that were equipped with Omega

radar and INS, and flown by civilian and military crews to pinpoint the position of the British fleet and eventually vector the Dagger aircraft to the target area. The Learjets were also used on many occasions to alert and decoy the British air defense system, causing them to make numerous expensive Harrier sorties and to take up needless alert situations.

- Argentinian aircraft did not have any ECM/ECCM and chaffs system except for the Canberras. Thus all the other fighters had to mask their approach to the target area by skimming over the waves and consequently suffered problems of salification on their planes. The C-130s too had to operate under similar conditions and on a night resupply mission to the islands, the planes accumulated more than half an inch of salt on their windshields.

To further aggravate the situation, the Argentinian war hypothesis never contemplated a conflict to be played within the operational air-sea arena; and the Argentinian Air Force lacked the most elementary training, experience and skills in such operations. To help reduce these problems, in April, while the British forces were approaching, the Argentinian Air Force carried out an one attack exercise against an Argentinian class 42 destroyer, in order to get some operational experience. However, the only valid lesson learned from the exercise was the conviction that attacking a naval fleet in the normal way, reduced the survivability rate to about 20 per cent. This real and dangerous discovery forced the Argentinian Air Force to select low-level, high-speed attack maneuvers.

Finally, the Argentinians experienced several non-explosions of their iron bombs. As the operations clearly proved later, these failure were due to inexperience in setting the fuzes properly. When the British media identified publicly this problem to the world, Argentinian munitions personnel readjusted the fuzes and the improved results were lethal to the British ships. In this respect one has to ask: what would have happened if all the bombs had functioned properly...? This war really became an "if" war.

In the transport field, the Argentinian Air Force did not have proper doctrine nor experience in large scale transport operations. However, with only some improvisation of their limited means, the Air Force was able to carry, in only 28 days, more than 5,000 tons of cargo tons and 8,000 personnel to support the three services.

The current doctrine adopted by all western military forces that stated the ineffectiveness of isolated operations was established by the USA in 1958. The decision for jointness was made after a heated discussion in which President Eisenhower stated before the US Congress: "separate wars on air, sea, and land are gone forever..." At the outbreak of hostilities Argentinian Armed Forces were in the midst of discussing the validity of this doctrine and very little effort was made to resolve their archaic approach.

To finish the discussion of this topic, it must be said that the overall performance of the Argentinian Air Force, the "junior

service" as it was called by the other services, far surpassed that of the other services. Its pilots took the risk of being shot down with enviable morale and determination to fight until the very end of the hostilities, even though they suffered an attrition rate of about 45 per cent. As the World II War ace Pierre Closterman stated..."the heroic sacrifice of Argentinian aviators has just given the world the most fabulous lesson of courage, because they have brilliantly faced adversity under even harder circumstances than those experienced by the RAF in 1940 and the Luftwaffe in 1945."

#### **AERIAL BATTLE. BRITISH CARRIERS HIT?**

After the war, one of the criticisms made against the Argentinian Air Force by international analysts, as well as by the other services of its own military, was that the Air Force got involved in its "private battle" against the British frigates and avoided attacks against carriers and logistic ships. Both assertions are fully erroneous and malicious. As was explained earlier, Argentinian fighter pilots had only a maximum of 5 minutes to remain on target due to fuel limitations; furthermore their attention was focused on avoiding the enemy anti-air weapons such as missiles and conventional antiaircraft weapons. Under these conditions they attacked the first ship that appeared on their heads-up-display (HUD),-- when they survived and reached the proper range to release their bombs or shoot the guns. It is also not true to say that they ever intended to attack the British carriers, as will be explained later. The implemented at-

tacks against the British carriers is one of the most controversial aspects of the war; the British has always denied it, while the Argentinian has lots of evidence to prove such attacks took place. Unfortunately, the British government declared all the information concerning military operations during the Malvinas Campaign, a military secret which will last for 90 years by the Official Secrets Act. On the other hand, Argentinian military forces never censored any kind of information concerning the war, and the author of this paper was able, without any restriction, to study official reports as well as talk with surviving pilots who participated in the attacks against both carriers, the Hermes and the Invincible. The following considerations have been excerpted from the book, Historia del Conflicto del Atlantico Sur, that was written in 1986 by the Argentinian Air Force Comodoro (Colonel), Ruben O. Moro. The book was written after thousands of hours of study and serious analysis, collecting and verifying all the information available. This book, in Spanish, is available in the AU Library, but unfortunately the English version is not yet published. When it is available in English, it will be the best documented book about the Malvinas campaign.

On May 1, the first real combat took place. As a result, Argentina claimed to have severely damaged one destroyer and hit two other frigates with bombs. The Exocet was not used on this day because none of the attacking aircraft carried such missiles.

On May 4, a group of British ships, one of them supposedly a carrier, was detected visually by a C-130 and was also picked up

on an Argentinian radar at Stanley. The radar also tracked some British Harriers going and coming. Plans were made to attack the carrier with two Super Etendard, each armed with an Exocet missile, of the II Air Naval Squadron. They took off at 09:44 and after being refuelled by a KC-130, acquired the ships on radar. They then engaged the missiles' computers on the biggest ship and released the missiles.

British official sources announced that day, that they had lost the Sheffield as a result of the Exocet attack; no mention was made about a carrier being attacked or hit. But the Hermes' presence in the area where the missiles were fired was confirmed as stated in the preceding paragraph and by radar information supplied by a Neptune P-2. On the same day an British officer, First Lieutenant Taylor, was shot down by Argentinian Artillery, and on his documents was the exact position of the Hermes, which, coincidentally was the same as that estimated by the Argentinians.

The Argentinians were confused by British official reports, but after an exhaustive analysis reached the following conclusions:

- The Sheffield was the ship that was seriously hit on May 1, using the BRP-250 bombs, and the British denied the fact for fear of adverse reaction by British citizens.
- The precise time that the British declared the Sheffield attacked, was exactly the same time when the Hermes was hit by the Exocet on May 4, according to Argentinian information.

- The meteorological conditions on May 4, according to Argentinian official information supplied by the Meteorological station in Stanley, were: "wind 270 at 10 knots, cloudy, 7/8 stratus at 300 feet, visibility 2000 meters with light fog..." On page 152 of the book The Battle for the Falklands, by Hastings and Jenkins, describing the Sheffield attack, they stated: "The weather was calm that morning, and visibility unusually good." This, in fact, was the exact weather on May 1, the day when the Argentinians attacked the Sheffield.

- The Sheffield was hit with bombs, not missiles. The first picture taken from the ship showed the damage as that expected of a BRP-250 bomb type and not of a missile. Those pictures also showed a calm sea, which corresponded to the weather conditions reported on May 1.

- On May 4, at the exact time the British declared that the Sheffield was attacked, journalists covering the war aboard the Hermes heard a loud explosion on the flight deck and the ship shook. When asked, they were told that a Sea Harrier had struck the deck and fallen into the sea. Shortly thereafter, all the media were moved out to the Invincible, and never returned to the Hermes again.

- Argentinian intelligence intercepted a message from the British Task Force saying: "Mercury can't fly".

- After May 4, facts demonstrated a severe draw-down in aerial activities from British carriers. The only Harrier activities were plotted to originate from a single point, the predictable

location of the other carrier, the Invincible. In addition to this, some information speculated by media seemed to confirm the damage suffered by the Hermes and also said that it was heading to Curacao for repairs.

- Argentinian reconnaissance detected, on May 10, a carrier escorted by six other ships 300 miles out of Stanley at position 52 S 52 W, sailing slowly.

The above are confirmed facts collected after the war from many different sources. To interpret them would be another question.

The planned D Day for the second British amphibious landing on the islands was May 30, but an unexpected event altered it; the Argentinian attack on the Invincible.

This mission was thoroughly studied and planned as a joint operation against the carrier, using 2 Super Etendards, which carried the last Argentinian Exocet, 4 A-4 Skyhawks with 3 BRP-250 bombs each, and 2 KC-130 tankers for refuelling. The carrier battle group in which the Invincible was supposed to be, was plotted by an Argentinian radar at Port Stanley as sailing in a East-West holding pattern 60 miles long, with the closest point to the islands being 80 miles and the farthest, 140 miles.

There were many limitations imposed on the attack, such as full radio silence, no emergency allowed for in the 8 participating aircraft, and performing successfully two in-flight refuellings by the fighters. The two Super Etendards acted as navigational systems to lead the A-4s to their target.



The key idea was to attack the naval battle group on an unexpected North-West vector which was more than 110 degrees off the naval anti-air defense axis in order to achieve an element of surprise. The mission was performed according to plan, and at 14:24 on May 30, the Super Etendard leader launched his Exocet. The two Super Etendards broke off and returned to their base. The four A-4s followed the missile's smoke wake, but before they could reach their armament release point the leader was shot down, probably by a Sea Dart, and sank into the sea. The other three could see an orange explosion on a ship, which as they approached recognized it as having a silhouette typical of a carrier. At this time the ship started to smoke on both sides of the central superstructure. A few seconds later the number two A-4 was also hit by the air artillery and disintegrated, but its engine struck the rear aircraft elevator of the ship, causing a great fire. The number three pilot triggered his cannons, but only two rounds fired. He was, however, luckier with his bombs which impacted the carrier's deck. He saw the explosion while performing an evasive maneuver and overflying the ship very close to its bridge.

Number four carried out its attack in a similar manner and while evading the ship's anti-air weapons, could see the huge carrier wrapped in smoke. When the two surviving pilots returned to their base it was 16:20. Two very long hours of flying, but nonetheless they were highly satisfied with their mission.

British official sources have always denied this attack, but

unofficial sources stated that the Invincible was hit on the port side of the stern, on the hangars, deck and also in the engine room, damaging one of the main turbines and causing a large fire.

(See Appendix A)

Let us now examine some contradictory facts related to this issue.

- The British reported that the Argentinians had attacked and destroyed the Atlantic Conveyor which was adrift at sea. Three facts contradict this theory:

a) The Atlantic Conveyor was abandoned by its crew on May 25, approximately 40 miles northwest of Stanley, and was adrift in this area for several subsequent days.

b) The Atlantic Conveyor could never have used the Sea Dart missiles or anti-air artillery, not only due to the fact that it was without a crew, but also because it had no anti-air missiles of its own.

c) The smoking ship, the Atlantic Conveyor, had already sunk on May 28 at position 51 07'S, 57 34'W, exactly 60 miles from the site where the Invincible was attacked two days later.

- A few minutes after the attack, unusual helicopter traffic heading East was detected on Stanley's radar. At the same time all British Harriers climbed to 40,000 feet in order to save fuel, and that afternoon some Harriers started to land on an improvised air strip on the islands.

- The Invincible was the last ship leaving the South Atlantic when the war ended, taking 51 days to arrive at Portsmouth. In

total this ship was on the sea for 166 days, surpassing by 13 days the old record established by the USS Eisenhower.

- When the Invincible finally arrived at Portsmouth, only Queen Elizabeth was permitted aboard to meet her son Prince Charles. No one else, especially the media, received clearance to visit the vessel.

- The planned British amphibious landing was aborted and delayed by the British commander.

To conclude this controversial issue, we think it is interesting to quote the story as presented on page 222 in the book War in the Falklands. The full story, written by The Sunday

Times of London's Insight Team:

Captain Colombo says his Squadron was already planning its final assault, when: "The higher-ups asked if we had any problem if they added four aircraft from the Air Force, four A-4s [Skyhawks] to attack Invincible. They said, 'You attack with Exocets and they will follow in and attack with bombs'...We said, no problem."

The idea was that two Etendards, with their inertial navigation system, would lead the Skyhawks to the target area, find the Invincible, and fire the last remaining Exocet. The Skyhawks would then follow the smoke trail of the missile and deliver the coup de grace with their bombs. And that is what almost happened.

The Etendards found a large blip on their radars, which they took to be the Invincible, and one of them fired the last Exocet. The Skyhawks followed it in. The missile got there first because it was faster. On the radio, the leader of the formation, Lieutenant Jose Daniel Vasquez, said as follows: "I am seeing it. It is an aircraft carrier. There are flames and a lot of smoke. The missile hit it squarely. Now I am going toward it in the trail left by the rocket. Now ...bombs away...Attention, number two. Confirm the damage. I am turning away to the right." Before he could say any more, Vasquez was shot down and so was the second Skyhawk; the other two fled.

That evening in Buenos Aires, confident rumor--as opposed to wild press speculation--had it that Invincible really had been put out of action.

The rumor, and Colombo, were wrong. Argentina had just wasted her last Exocet on the bulk of Atlantic Conveyor, the ship she had already killed. That evening, London time, the Ministry

of Defense quietly announced that the huge lady had "sunk."

#### CONFRONTING LOSSES.

Enemies never have agreed on losses; for this reason in this section we will only state the declared official losses from both sides, although the Argentinian viewpoint will be explained a little deeper for two main reasons: first, this paper tries to show the more unknown sources, as Argentina's have been, and second because very little British information is available due to the afore-mentioned Military Secrets Act.

British official losses: (Taken from: The Falklands Campaign: The Lessons, presented to Parliament by the Secretary of State for Defence by Command of Her Majesty. December 1982)

--Ships lost: Six (6) -Sheffield, Ardent, Antelope, Coventry, Atlantic Conveyor, and Sir Galahad. The report only mentioned three more ships damaged, with very short explanations.

In the afore mentioned book Historia del Conflicto del Atlantico Sur, the British losses are evaluated higher, stating that after two years working on the task, checking different sources, and confronting all official and unofficial sources available, the results are: Ships sunk, destroyed or unrecoverable 9, with major damage 12, and with minor damage 11. In total, from Argentinian sources, 32 British ships were hit, suffering damage of varying levels.

For her part, Argentina lost 1 cruiser, 1 transport and 1 submarine sunk, plus 5 minor ships damaged or captured.

--Aircraft and Helicopters. It is almost impossible to obtain a

definite picture of losses of aircraft, because in spite of the normal discrepancies, each country has different ways to establish concepts such as "confirmed", "probable", "damaged", etc.

Official Argentinian sources declared that 57 aircraft and 15 helicopters were lost, not including those that were damaged or captured. The British estimated a total of 117 Argentinian aircraft destroyed, including probable and those destroyed on the ground. Out of those, 107 were fixed-wing and 10 were helicopters. The British declared 9 Harriers and 24 Helicopters lost; there was no mention of damages.

On British losses, the initial Argentinian estimate was 39 aircraft (17 confirmed, 11 probable, and 11 damaged.) But, Comodoro Moro states that he obtained from secret British sources the accurate losses, which are much higher than Argentinian calculations. The following are Moro's figures: 31 Harriers shot-down or destroyed through different causes, and 16 damaged. The same unofficial British source quoted the attrition rate of helicopters as 46.

Human losses are also a controversial point, but as repeatedly stated, Argentina published the names of its losses with the corresponding units and dates, while the British did not. The only mention of British casualties is found in the above mentioned Report to the Parliament, which in a small footnote on page 27 states: "In all 255 task force lives, Service and civilian, were lost in the operation. A further 777 were injured." Argentinian declared human losses are: 635 dead and 1,068 in-

jured.

As a conclusion, the only comment we might offer is that the UK, especially Mrs. Thatcher and her cabinet recovered the islands but had to pay a high price for it. The British government put the cost of the operation at 700 million pounds, plus another additional 900 million for lost of ships and planes. Nonetheless, an unofficial estimate put the cost of regaining and holding the islands at 2 billion pounds over four years.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

#### THE CONSEQUENCES FOR ARGENTINA, THE UK, AND THE US.

We will start with Argentina as it was, theoretically the side that started the conflict. In the Argentinian political arena, the Junta was removed, indicted and tried after the defeat; later, a democratic system was established. Perhaps for once the Argentinian military understood that their role was not political but professional, and always under the command of a civilian government chosen freely by the people. The last "plot" in 1986 supports this theory.

In the international arena, Argentina has strengthened its ties with other Latin American countries, and developing better economical, political and military cooperation.

Regarding the Malvinas issue, things are "back to square one" since Argentina will never renounce her right to the islands. The British may have won a battle, but they have not won the war. A negotiated settlement of the question is the only rational long term solution to the conflict between these two countries. Without such an agreement, this extraordinary, stupid and senseless war could probably start once again with even greater losses. The present or Argentinian future governments will have to "reopen" the Malvinas issue in international forums, in order to gain world-wide understanding that the colonial era is gone and thus achieve success.

In the military area, Argentina has learned many lessons from its first real war. All three services will have to come to terms with one another following the serious split among themselves during and indeed before the war. The Argentinian military will also have to recover the trust of their people, to restructure themselves to improve their weaknesses as discovered in the campaign.

For the UK we do not see any benefit gained from the war, except national pride and reinforced self-confidence. Economically the war was and remains a heavy burden on the British economy. The burden could even be prolonged as it is faced with spending billions of pounds in the foreseeable future to maintain a large military garrison to protect about 1,800 "half-British" citizens.

In the political aspect, if only we could weigh the lessons of the war, the cons would probably outweigh the pros. Furthermore, today the international community is repeatedly trying to function under the rules of the law, justice and mutual understanding. Colonial situations are no longer acceptable.

The United States lost the most in this crisis. Trapped by its multinational commitments and lacking a preplanned policy to deal with such a development that caught them by surprise, the US, eventually took to the British side, while disregarding common InterAmerican agreements and treaties. Finally Argentina did nothing more than what the Americans did two centuries ago -it rebelled against British colonization.



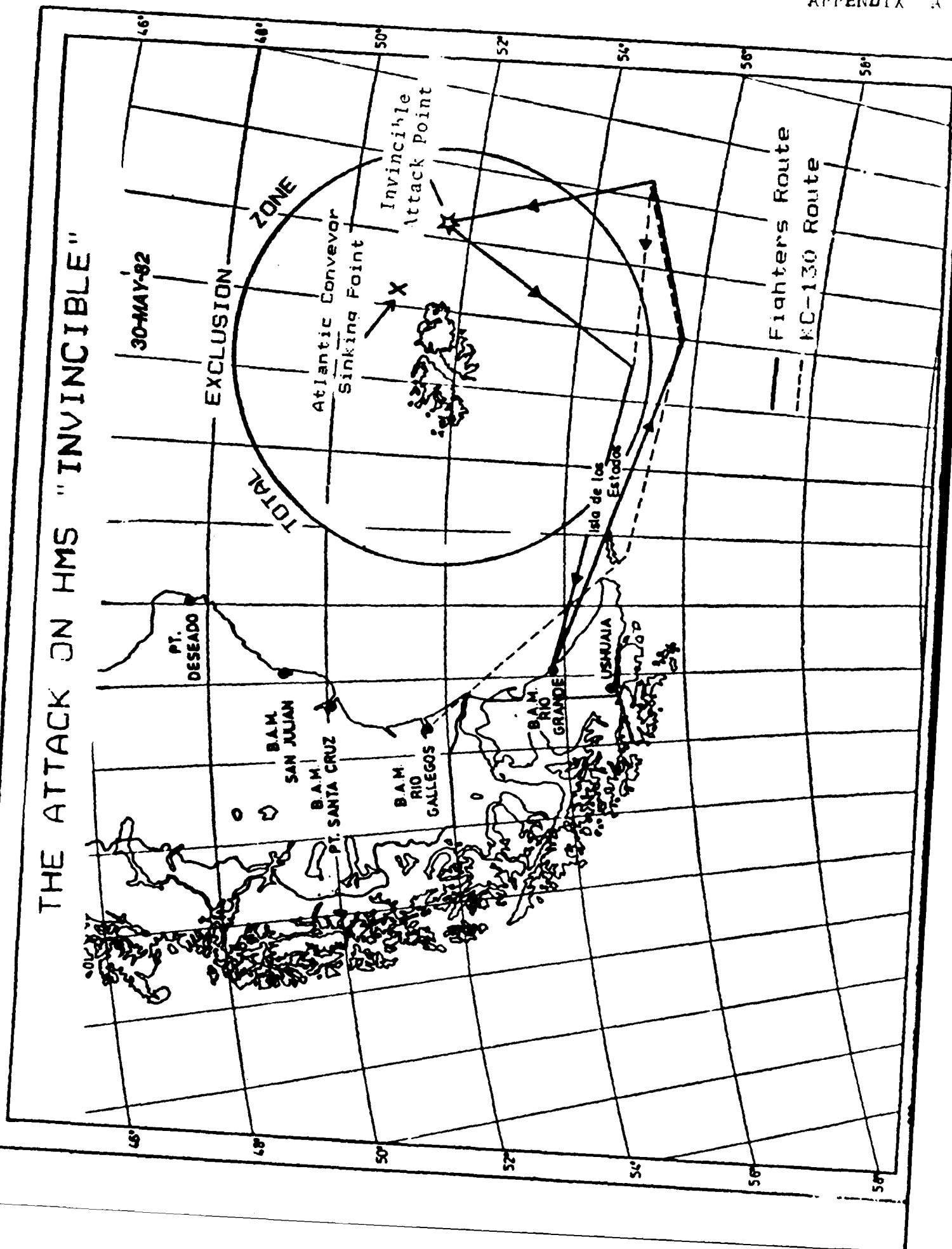
The lack of warning, indeed the lack of desire to prepare for crisis management in Latin America, except in the solitary case of Cuba, and more recently in Nicaragua, produced a blind spot in efforts to resolve the crisis by Washington. The loss of credibility as a result of US actions, or lack of them, must be evaluated for future use should the US have to confront a similar crisis in its own hemisphere.

#### LESSONS LEARNED:

-- Once again the inability of the United Nations to resolve an international dispute was evident. It appears only the superpowers can impose their will, and in this case the war did not change the status of the Malvinas. The problems and issues remain as they were at the beginning; in fact they only added another problem to international strategic instability.

- Any war is expensive, but if a country has to project its military power as the only means to achieve its national objectives, it must consider every possibility. Forgetting or ignoring any of them, as Argentina did, will portend failures, indeed very large failures which will remain for generations.

# THE ATTACK ON HMS "INVINCIBLE"



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